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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA: PEACE PROCESS UPDATE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) delegation plan to meet leader Joseph Kony from January 15-17 to present the outcome of the consultations held in Uganda. The logistical and financial preparations for the planned larger meeting of 300 Ugandans with Kony have been stalled and remain in question, which could further delay the restart of the Juba talks. Government of Southern Sudan Vice President Machar met with the Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team (CHMT) over the non-payment of their allowances since November, and the use of U.S.-donated vehicles. U.N. Special Envoy for LRA-Affected Areas Joachim Chissano has delayed his trip to the region. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) delegation plans to travel to Rikwangba assembly area from January 15 to 17. The delegation plans to present the results of its November-December 2007 consultations in Uganda to LRA leader Joseph Kony. It is not clear if the logistical arrangements for the meeting with Kony have solidified. The LRA still plans to hold a large consultative meeting between Kony and about 300 Ugandans, primarily from the north. The dates for the meeting continue to be pushed back because of a lack of logistical and financial support. Members of the Government of Southern Sudan Secretariat for the talks have been on vacation and approvals for funding stopped over the holidays. The LRA had wanted to hold the wider consultation on January 18, but discussions with various LRA delegation members, the Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team (CHMT), and northern leaders indicate that preparations were chaotic and no firm arrangements or dates had been set.

¶3. (SBU) Members of the CHMT met with Government of Southern Sudan Vice President and mediator for the Juba Talks, Riek Machar, on January 12. The CHMT told Machar that its members had not been paid their allowances for November, December, or January and had spent Christmas in Juba without any transportation or financial means. Machar apologized to the team, explaining that GOSS Secretariat members had been on vacation. The CHMT also raised concerns that the four U.S.-donated trucks were sitting at Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) headquarters with SPLA license plates on them and were not with the CHMT. Two different CHMT members told P/E Chief that they doubt that there will be follow-up on their allowances or the disposition of the U.S. trucks. P/E Chief raised the issue of the allowances with Canadian consul in Kampala, Bryan Burton. Burton promised to look into the issue, as Canada was one of the donors to the Juba Initiative Fund.

¶4. (SBU) In a telephone call to Gulu District Chairman Norbert Mao, Kony "admitted" that he had made a big mistake in killing his deputy, Vincent Otti. He told Mao that he would explain the circumstances at the consultation at Rikwangba. Kony worried over what he described as U.S. pressure on Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo to hand over Charles Taylor to the Special Tribunal on Sierra Leone, and U.S. involvement in Saddam Hussein's hanging.

Kony also complained about the looming January 31 deadline. Mao asked Kony what it would take for him to accept a peace deal. Kony did not have an answer, but Mao felt he made some progress with the LRA leader in terms of getting him to focus on the elements of a deal rather than the January 31 deadline, which President Museveni said was flexible if there were irreversible progress at the talks.

¶15. (SBU) Meanwhile, Gulu Resident District Commissioner, Walter Ochora, and Col. Charles Otema, Director, Special Operations, Ugandan Peoples' Defense Forces (UPDF) warned that the Government of Uganda could not guarantee security for northerners traveling to Rikwangba for the consultations. Ochora told P/E Chief and DATT on January 8 that he had serious concerns about Kony's mental state and worried that he might do something unpredictable at the gathering. Ochora and Otema do not believe Kony is interested in a peaceful end to the conflict. They believe that Kony will need to be under significant military pressure in order to agree to a deal; even then, the prospects for a lasting agreement would be elusive.

¶16. (SBU) Comment: The Juba peace process is off to a rough start after the holidays. We expect U.N. Special Envoy Joachim Chissano's visit to the region, now delayed a week, might lend some clarity on the timeline for the talks to resume. He also will likely remind the LRA that there is some flexibility in the deadline as long as there is progress at the negotiations. End Comment.

CHRITTON